
Michael R. Jackson Bonner. *The Last Empire of Iran*

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/52092>

DOI: 10.4000/abstractairanica.52092

ISBN: 1961-960X

ISSN: 1961-960X

Publisher:

CNRS (UMR 7528 Mondes iraniens et indiens), Éditions de l'IFRI

Electronic reference

Domiziana Rossi, "Michael R. Jackson Bonner. *The Last Empire of Iran*", *Abstracta Iranica* [Online], Volume 42-43 | 2020, document 12, Online since 30 December 2020, connection on 20 April 2021.

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/52092> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abstractairanica.52092>

This text was automatically generated on 20 April 2021.

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REFERENCES

Michael R. Jackson Bonner. *The Last Empire of Iran*. Piscataway. New Jersey: Gorgias Press LLC, 2020, 396 p., bibliography, index

- 1 M. R. Jackson Bonner states that his narrative of Sasanian political history has been written for a general audience by avoiding academic debates and historiographical digressions. This much needed handbook consists of nine chapters in which Sasanian history is assessed within the context of all its neighbours; from the Iberian territories, to the Armenian struggles, the Chinese embassies, the relationships with the nomads of Hira, political developments in the Asiatic steppes, and last but not least, the eternal foe, the Roman empire.
- 2 Key issues of Sasanian political history are covered, setting the events within the context of the deep interconnectivity of the Late Antique world. Covering new scholarship, the book combines efficient use of the primary sources and archaeological evidence (for instance, the Gorgan excavations and Adam and Hansen's survey in the Diyala region).
- 3 All the events are firstly premised with a historical outline, while the narrative follows the succession of the various *Šāhānšāhs*. The explanation of the facts previous to the Sasanians in the first chapter, 'Eurasia from the Conquests of Alexander to the Fall of Parthia', is one of the reasons why this is an optimal handbook for whoever wants to acknowledge the historical causes that intertwined and eventually led to the rise of Ardashir.
- 4 The events succeeding in the nine chapters follow a 'vertical' and chronological order, and at the same time a 'geographical' and more 'horizontal' one. The content is indeed organised clearly and homogenously, displaying a diachronic narrative of the Sasanian

dynasty and its neighbours. Thus, the chapters do not just focus on Sasanian relationships with the western empire, but there is also a special focus on the events in the nomadic 'world' and the influence on Late Antiquity. This is particularly true during all the Sasanian history, and not just from Peroz onwards. In the second chapter, 'The Establishment of the House of Sasan', Ardashir's conquests eastwards receive special mentioning, together with Sasan's hypothesised connections to India. Also, in the third chapter, 'From Shapur I to Shapur II', it is stressed how the southern Huns moving towards west and the lack of the Sasanian Kushan state as buffer influenced Shapur II's actions at the Roman frontier.

- 5 Another novelty is expanding the narrative with some members of the dynasty who are often forgotten by both the main primary sources and part of the scholarship. Among the others, it is worth mentioning the alleged Arsacid wife of Ardashir, Shapur II's brother Adur Narseh, Shapur II's uncles Shapur and Hormizd, Yazdgard I's wife Shishin-Dukht, Khosrow I's son Anush Zad.
- 6 The last chapter, 'The Collapse of the House of Sasan', stresses the developments of the civil war held between the fall of Kavad II and to the rise of Yazdegerd III and how this was among the causes of the Sasanian defeat and the Arab-Muslim conquest. Within this narrative, a detail stands out: according to the *Shahnameh*, general Rostam's alleged letter claims the arrival of an Arab emissary offering terms before the battle of Qadisiya. The pragmatic tone of the emissary suggests to Bonner that orthodox Muslim may have startled during the conquest of Iran. If this thread turns out to be correct, it would change the modern perception of a pious army that won an empire thanks to the strength of its faith.
- 7 This book is much needed and appreciated, especially for the precision of the primary source references.

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